



September 2016

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Vacant Parcel Catalog

This catalog was created by the Office of Food Initiatives in partnership with the Department of Neighborhood Development to identify City-owned vacant parcels suitable for urban farming. Our collective aim is to foster a community of farmers whose work can make a positive impact in Boston neighborhoods. The introduction provides a justification for converting vacant sites to productive space. Each entry in this catalog contains an overview of the site and includes visuals, maps, and neighborhood context. At the end of the catalog, there is a list of criteria for successful candidates, as well as resources to guide you in starting conversations about urban farming in your neighborhood.





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Introduction



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Defining Urban Agriculture

Urban Agriculture is the practice of producing food and raising animals in an urban environment. However, it differs from large scale, rural farming in that the elements of an urban landscape—social, environmental, and economic—need to be integrated into the farming model in order for the enterprise to be sustainable. In this way, urban agriculture involves activities beyond growing crops and raising animals. Farmers may offer training programs, special events, and volunteer opportunities. They may participate in direct-to-consumer markets, such as farm stands, farmers' markets, or community supported agriculture (CSA) where consumers pay for a share of the produce at the beginning of the season and receive it throughout. Urban farming operations can bolster the local food system by bringing fresh, healthy produce to surrounding communities and offering employment to local residents. Cohen, Reynolds, and Sanghvi (2012) capture the complexity of urban agriculture in their definition:

Urban agriculture can be defined as growing fruits, herbs and vegetables, and raising animals in cities, a process that is accompanied by many other complementary activities such as processing and distributing food, collecting and reusing food waste and rainwater, and educating organizing and employing local residents.¹



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Introduction

The Purpose of Urban Farming Enterprises in Boston

The work of urban farmers intersects with many realms, including health, society, environment, and economy. Because of urban farmers' ability to impact the surrounding community, growing food on small plots of land, on rooftops, and in greenhouses is as much a purpose-driven activity as it is a profit-driven one. Depending on the focus of the farm entity, be it an organization or a business, a unique set of goals or values underpin the mission and become an inherent part of the food production process. A sampling of mission statements from urban agricultural organizations located in Boston captures the diversity of work needed to change the food system to better serve residents:

1. Urban Farming Institute's (UFI) mission entails "building a healthier, more locally based food system" through education, research, training, and acquiring land for farming.²
2. Nubian United Benevolent International Association (NUBIA) strives to "impart a lasting impact on **food justice, community revitalization, and youth development** through education of Nubian culture and heritage, community agriculture, and educational workshops."³
3. The Food Project's (TFP) mission is to "create a thoughtful and productive community of youth and adults from diverse backgrounds who work together to build a sustainable food system."⁴
4. Eastie Farm "is dedicated to improving food access and community resilience through the development of interactive urban agricultural spaces, where residents of all ages and backgrounds are encouraged to learn and take part in the production of healthy, locally-grown, and culturally relevant foods."⁵
5. OASIS on Ballou is a productive space that "supports a culture of opportunity, affirmation, sustainability, inspiration, and success . . . and reflects the pride in our neighborhood"⁶



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Programmatic Elements of Urban Farms in Boston

Urban farms often tie in creative programming with their operations to help connect people to the practice of food production. In order for a small farm to succeed in an urban environment, it must be connected not only to the physical landscape, but also the social and economic landscapes. In Boston, farming organizations include elements of programming that provide opportunities for neighbors and community members. Here are a few examples of how each organization creates its own niche within the community:

1. UFI hosts a farmer training program for new and aspiring farmers to become learned in the business operations and management of urban farming.
2. NUBIA hosts a 'Seed and Yield' youth internship program, which provides students with extra curricular experience in gardening and customer service.
3. TFP has a community growing program in their greenhouse, which affords space to community members interested in growing their own crops. Participants must apply and pay an annual fee, as well as do chores and volunteer at TFP events.
4. Eastie Farm hosts special events throughout the season. Most well known are their weekly work parties, open to the public, where neighbors get together and work in the garden.
5. OASIS on Ballou has a Tot Lot, a safe outdoor space where small children come to play.



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Integrating Urban Farms into the Social Landscape of Boston

Each entry in this catalog is accompanied by a list of community resources that make up its social landscape; that is, schools, community groups, markets and other institutions that may be interested in partnering with an urban farm. The best community partnerships are symbiotic. We encourage candidates to engage these various entities to get support for acquiring a city owned parcel. Candidates may also take the opportunity to consider if people in their communities would like to be part of the farm development and operations.

Several connections can exist between an urban farm and its surrounding community (Figure 1). First, if city government issues necessary permits for the farm to operate, food produced at the farm can go to various markets where local residents shop. Residents then have the opportunity to learn about growing practices by shopping locally and can provide suggestions to the farmers on what they would like to see at the markets. Produce left at the end of the day can be donated to a local food pantry or meal program to reduce waste. Students from a nearby school can intern or volunteer at the farm as they learn about making healthy choices with respect to food.

Introduction

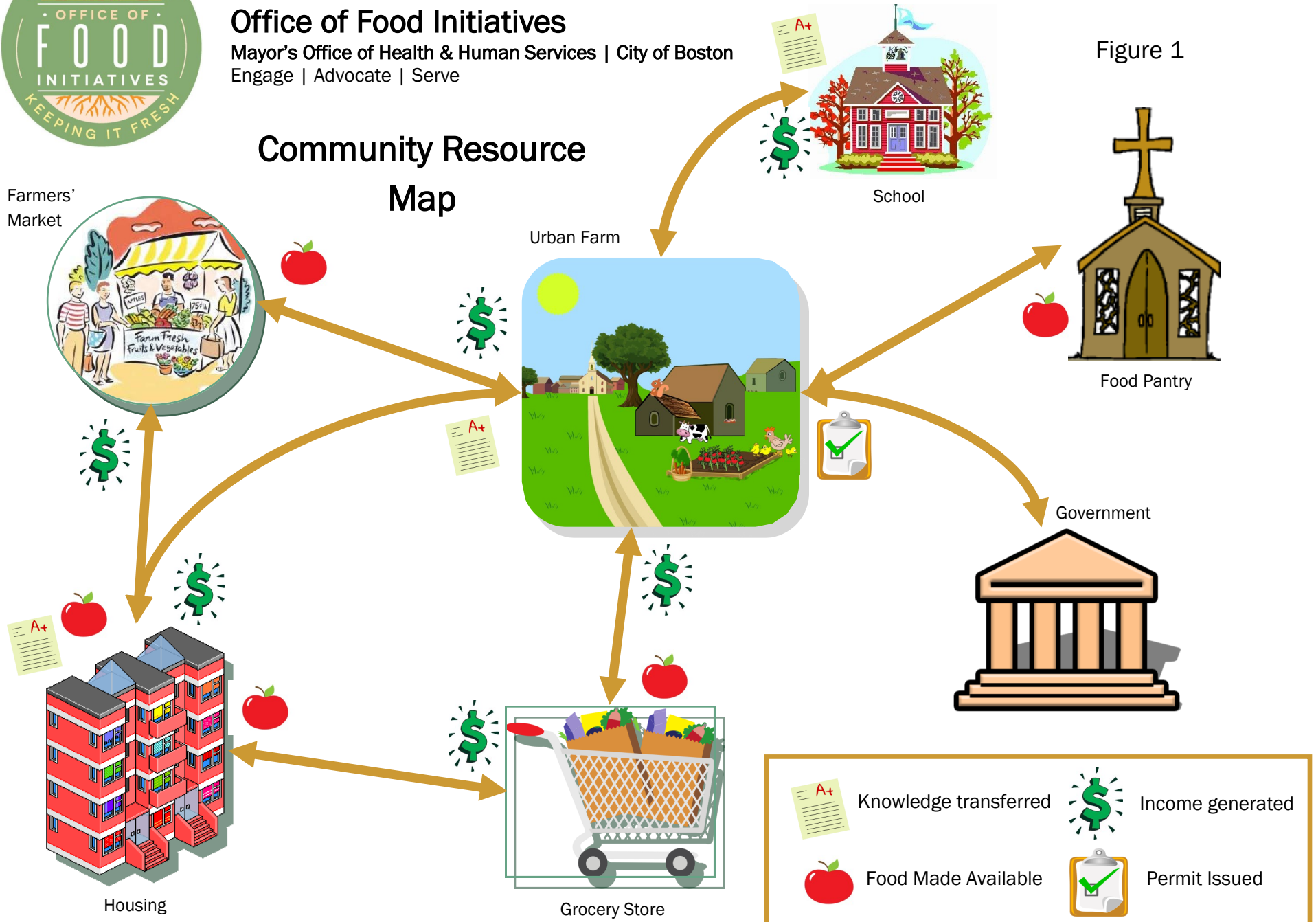
Figure 1



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Community Resource Map





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Introduction

Examples of Symbiotic Partnerships

A Community Development Corporation (CDC) identifies clients who are food insecure and refers them to visit the farm stand at the local urban farm.

The candidate needs a funder to purchase and protect the land from being sold to a developer and enlists the CDC to aid in land acquisition.



A school identifies some students as prediabetic and wishes to educate them about where nutritious food comes from. Students make visits to the farm.

Students provide labor for the farm and some students return as interns over the summer, helping in overall maintenance of the site.



A local pantry hosted in a church is looking for fresh produce to give away to parishioners and takes extras from the farm when produce is abundant.

The farm reduces waste and gets feedback from the community on cultural preferences for crops.





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Vacant Sites



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Vacant Sites

Site Overview

The site at 314 Harvard Street is located in the neighborhood of Dorchester, near Mattapan. Dorchester is a diverse neighborhood, home to 38,683 foreign born people, which is 32.0% of the population.⁷ Nearly a quarter of the population (24.2%) are children under 18, and 9.0% of the population are elderly, above age 65.⁸ These age characteristics highlight special needs around food because these populations are more susceptible to food insecurity. Looking more closely at the census tract where the site is located, tract 1001, it is possible that a production site can be an asset to the food insecure population.



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- At a rate of 30.8%, food insecurity is prevalent in tract 1001.⁹ One out of every three people does not know where their next meal is coming from for two days out of the week.¹⁰ A production site in this location can serve as a point of access for fresh, healthy food, especially if the farmer sells the produce at an onsite farm stand, through a CSA program, or nearby at a farmers' market or corner store.
- At a rate of 33.7%, one third of individuals in this census tract live in poverty, a factor that significantly contributes to food insecurity.¹¹ If these individuals are utilizing SNAP benefits, then they are automatically eligible to use Boston Bounty Bucks at their local farmers' market. The incentive program offers SNAP recipients an additional discount by matching their purchase of up to ten dollars. A local farmer selling at a nearby market can contribute to the affordability of fresh, healthy food. Additionally, through CSA, food can be made affordable.¹² Farmers can offer a sliding scale to accommodate people of different household incomes to support a range of consumers.
- Unemployment, another contributing factor of food insecurity, is 14.5% or 1 out of 7 in the census tract.¹³ A farming operation can provide jobs, internships, and/or job training for local residents, and in doing so stimulates the local economy. Income generated by produce sales goes into salaries for local residents.

Vacant Sites

Food Insecurity

Food Insecurity Rate	30.8%
Boston FI Rate	16.6%
Unemployment Rate	14.5%
Poverty Rate	33.7%
Percent Black/African American	77.4%
Percent Hispanic/Latino	25.9%
Home Ownership Rate	19.0%
Median Household Income	\$28,671

Source: Food insecurity rates made available through the following research: Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, A. Crumbaugh, M. Kato & E. Engelhardt. *Map the Meal Gap 2016: Food Insecurity and Child Food Insecurity Estimates at the County Level*. Feeding America, 2016. Food Insecurity and additional data compiled and visualized by D. Taitelbaum, The Greater Boston Food Bank, 2016.



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Vacant Sites

Community Resources

Community Groups

Lena Park Community Development Corporation
Boys and Girls Clubs of Boston
ReVision Urban Farm and Farmstand

Community Institutions

Harvard Street Neighborhood Health Center
Joseph Lee Elementary School
Greater Love Tabernacle Church

Markets

La Bamba Supermarket
Happy Supermarket
Las Americas Market
Tropic Market

Transportation

Buses 28 and 29 stop at Blue Hill Ave across from
Health Center and Blue Hill Ave at Paxton Street

Potential Partnerships

Aids in land acquisition and site development
Farm provides educational experience for children
ReVision stocks farm produce at their stand

Indoor farm stand serves patients
Students take a field trip to the farm
Parishioners volunteer and receive produce from
the farm

Markets spread word about the farm and vend
fresh produce from the farm

Local residents visit the farm for special events



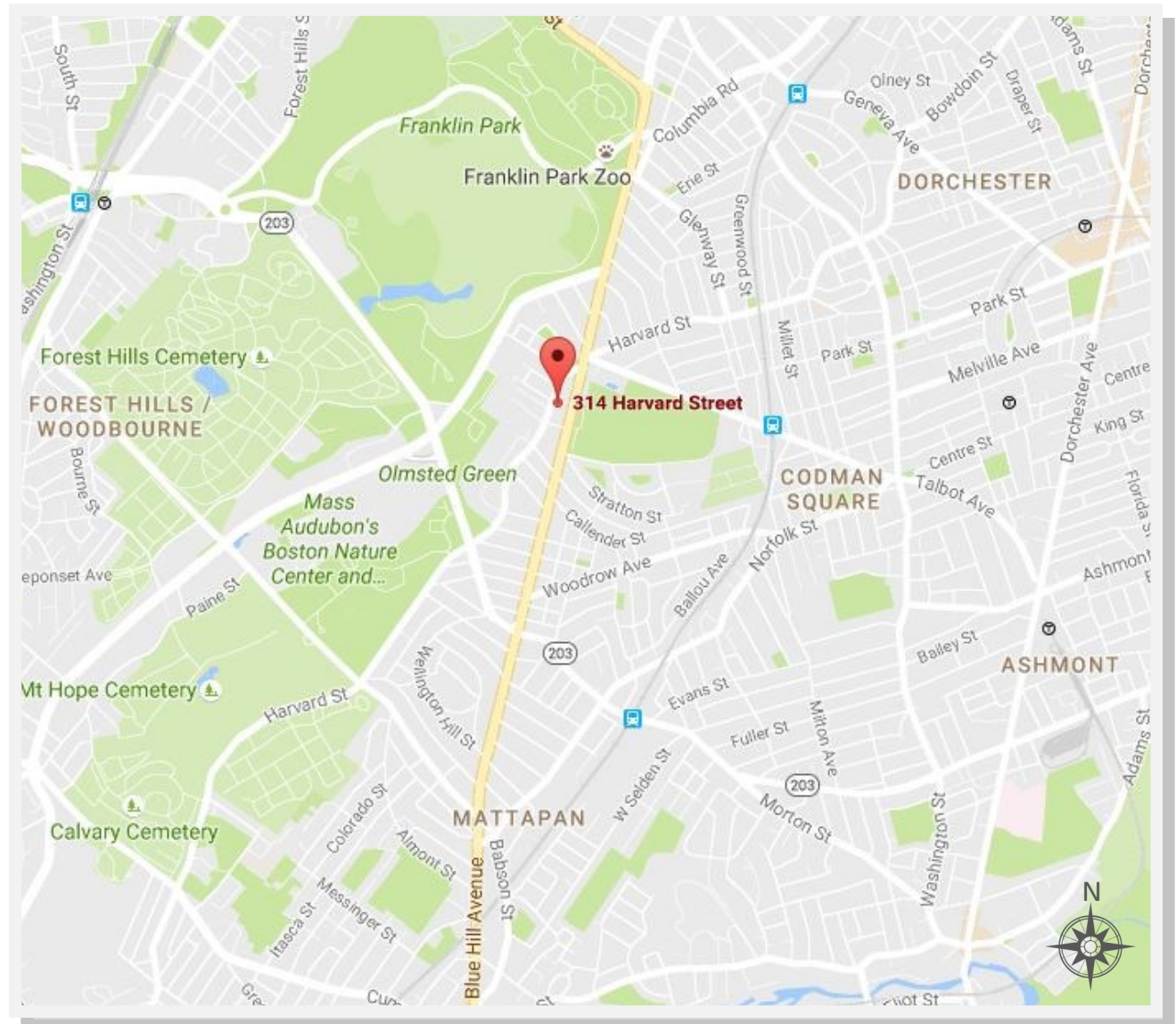
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Vacant Sites

Site Location

- The map shows the location of **314 Harvard Street, Dorchester, Boston MA 02124**, which is located in Dorchester near Harambee Park and Franklin Park Zoo.





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Vacant Sites

Size: 9,664 SF

- The parcel marked in **red** is the vacant lot at 314 Harvard Street. It is a rectangular site located at the intersection of Lorne and Harvard streets and is surrounded by residences. The parcel totals **9,664 square feet**.
- The abutting vacant lot at 312 is owned by Fieldstone Apartments LP.





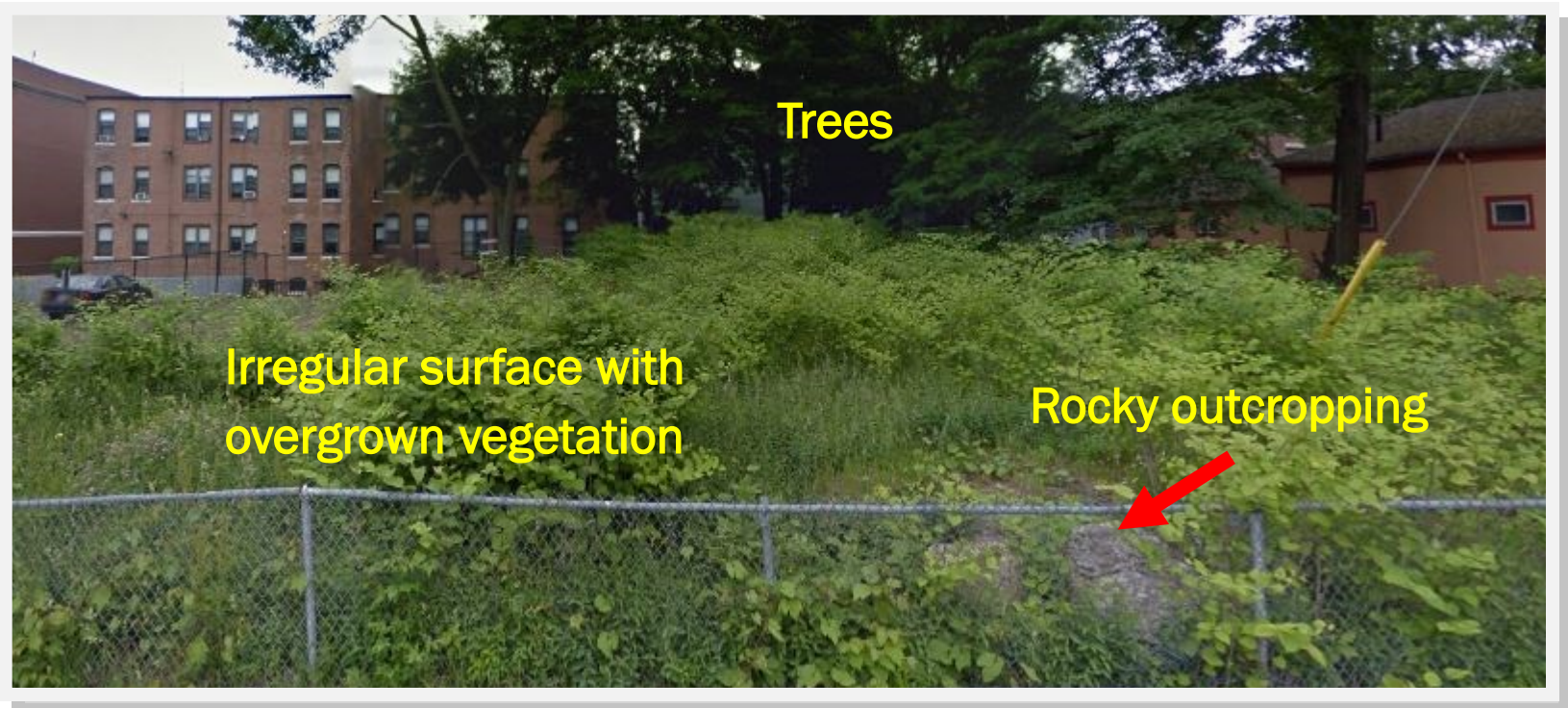
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Vacant Sites

Street View

- The view from the intersection of Lorne and Harvard streets shows some physical challenges to developing the site. The farm will have to be constructed over an irregular surface with a granite outcropping. Trees in the rear of the site may need to be removed.





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Vacant Sites

Aerial View

- The aerial view of 314 Harvard Street shows several trees that may need to be removed to allow for sunlight. The site is in a residential area with a few of abutters to the east and south.





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Vacant Sites

Amenities

There are several agencies which regulate urban farms. In order to comply with the City zoning code for urban farms, it is necessary to adhere to the principles outlined in Article 89. See *Article 89 Made Easy* for more information. The original zoning code can be found on the Boston Redevelopment Authority website.

The following is a list of amenities that are regulated. Blank boxes indicate amenities that need to be included in the development plan for the site.

- ☒ Street Number
- ☐ Design Review
- ☐ Signage
- ☒ Wetlands Resource Area
- ☒ Historic Districts and Landmark Properties
- ☒ Near City Parks
- ☒ Greenbelt Protection Area

- ☒ Neighborhood Design Review District
- ☒ Neighborhood Design Overlay District
- ☐ Use of Premises Permit
- ☐ Water Connection
- ☐ Nutrient Management Plan
- ☐ Electricity Connection
- ☐ Curb Cut
- ☒ City Tree Removal
- ☐ Soil Test
- ☐ Composting
- ☐ Structures (Building Permit)
- ☐ Business Permit

For a step by step instructions on navigating site development for ground level farms less than one acre, please refer to the Harvard Food Law and Policy Council Guide (listed on page).



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Vacant Sites

Site Overview

The site adjacent to 640 River Street is located in the south of Mattapan, near Hyde Park and Milton, Massachusetts. Mattapan is a diverse neighborhood, home to 8,701 foreign born people, or 35.9% of the population.¹⁴ There are also 5,520 children under 18, or 22.8% of the population and 3,086 elderly over 65, or 12.7% of the population.¹⁵ Both children and elderly have special needs around food, and are more vulnerable to food insecurity. With large groups of children and elderly, it is possible that a production site will be an asset to the neighborhood of Mattapan. A closer look at census tract 1010.01, where the site is located, shows in more detail how the addition of an urban farm can address food insecurity.



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- In tract 1010.01, food insecurity occurs at a rate of 32.9%, which means 1 out of 3 people experience this condition.¹⁶ A local production site has the potential to increase the availability of food in the area. If the farmer sells produce at an onsite farm stand, a CSA program, or nearby at a farmers' market or corner store, the neighborhood residents will have increased physical access to fresh, healthy food.
- The poverty rate in the census tract is 20.8%; 1 out of 5 people experience poverty.¹⁷ Rate of poverty significantly contributes to the rate of food insecurity.¹⁸ Some individuals affected by food insecurity utilize SNAP benefits, and they are automatically eligible to use Boston Bounty Bucks at their local farmers' market. This dollar matching program provides an incentive to SNAP recipients to purchase fresh food at their farmers' market. A local urban farmer can contribute to affordability through vending at farmers' markets. Additionally, urban farmers can provide a sliding scale for their CSA shares to accommodate households of lower income.
- Unemployment rate is as high as poverty at 20.8%, meaning 1 out of 5 people are unemployed.¹⁹ A contributing factor of food insecurity, unemployment can be addressed by incorporating agricultural enterprises into the community fabric. A farm operation can offer employment, internships and job training to local residents including youth.

Vacant Sites

Food Insecurity

Food Insecurity Rate	32.9%
Boston FI Rate	16.6%
Unemployment Rate	20.8%
Poverty Rate	20.8%
Percent Black/African American	93.2%
Percent Hispanic/Latino	6.8%
Home Ownership Rate	49.7%
Median Household Income	\$46,733

Source: Food insecurity rates made available through the following research: Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, A. Crumbaugh, M. Kato & E. Engelhardt. *Map the Meal Gap 2016: Food Insecurity and Child Food Insecurity Estimates at the County Level*. Feeding America, 2016. Food Insecurity and additional data compiled and visualized by D. Taitelbaum, The Greater Boston Food Bank, 2016.



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Vacant Sites

Community Resources

Community Groups	Potential Partnership
ABCD Mattapan Headstart	recommends food insecure clients to visit farm stand, connects students with internship at farm
Community Institutions	
Match Community Day Charter Public School	students can intern at farm, providing labor and receiving experience
Markets	
World's Best Food and Vegetarian	provides space to sell cultural crops
Mattapan Farmers' Market	
Transportation	provides space for farmer to sell produce, farmer can accept WIC, SNAP and Bounty Bucks
Buses 24, 24/27, and 33 stop at River St @ Caton St	
Subway Red Line stops at Mattapan Station	Local residents can carry their produce on the bus instead of walking
	Visitors from other neighborhoods can connect with and tour the farm



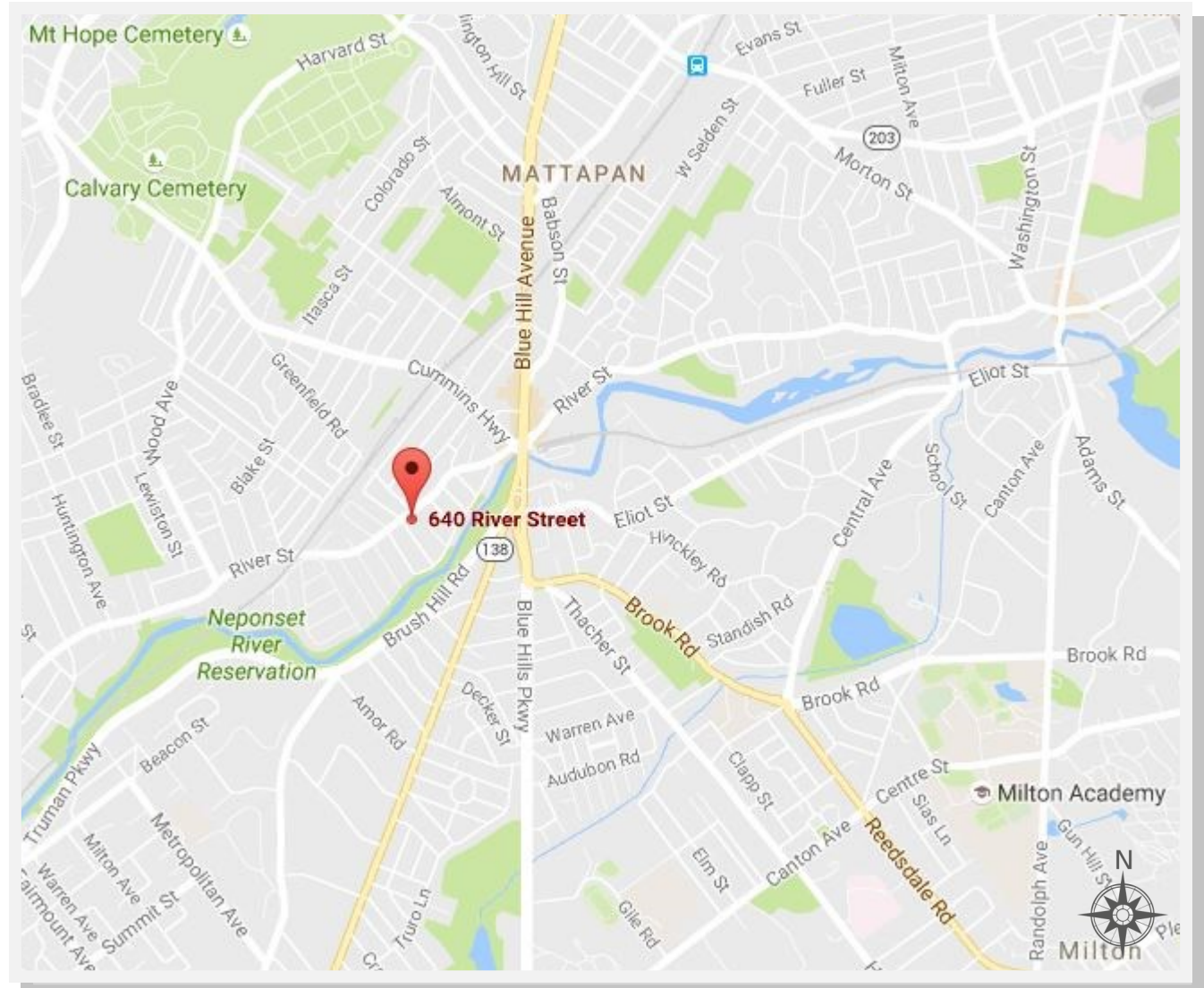
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Vacant Sites

Location

- The map shows the location of **640 River St, Mattapan, Boston, MA 02126**, adjacent to which is a vacant parcel which is suitable for urban agriculture.





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Vacant Sites

Size: 10,774 SF

- The flag shape marked in **red** is composed of two parcels, both adjacent to 640 River Street. The skinny rectangle is a strip between two residential lots and will be the access road to the main site, which is generally rectangular in shape. The total square footage of both parcels is 11,864, while the main farming area is 10,774 square feet.





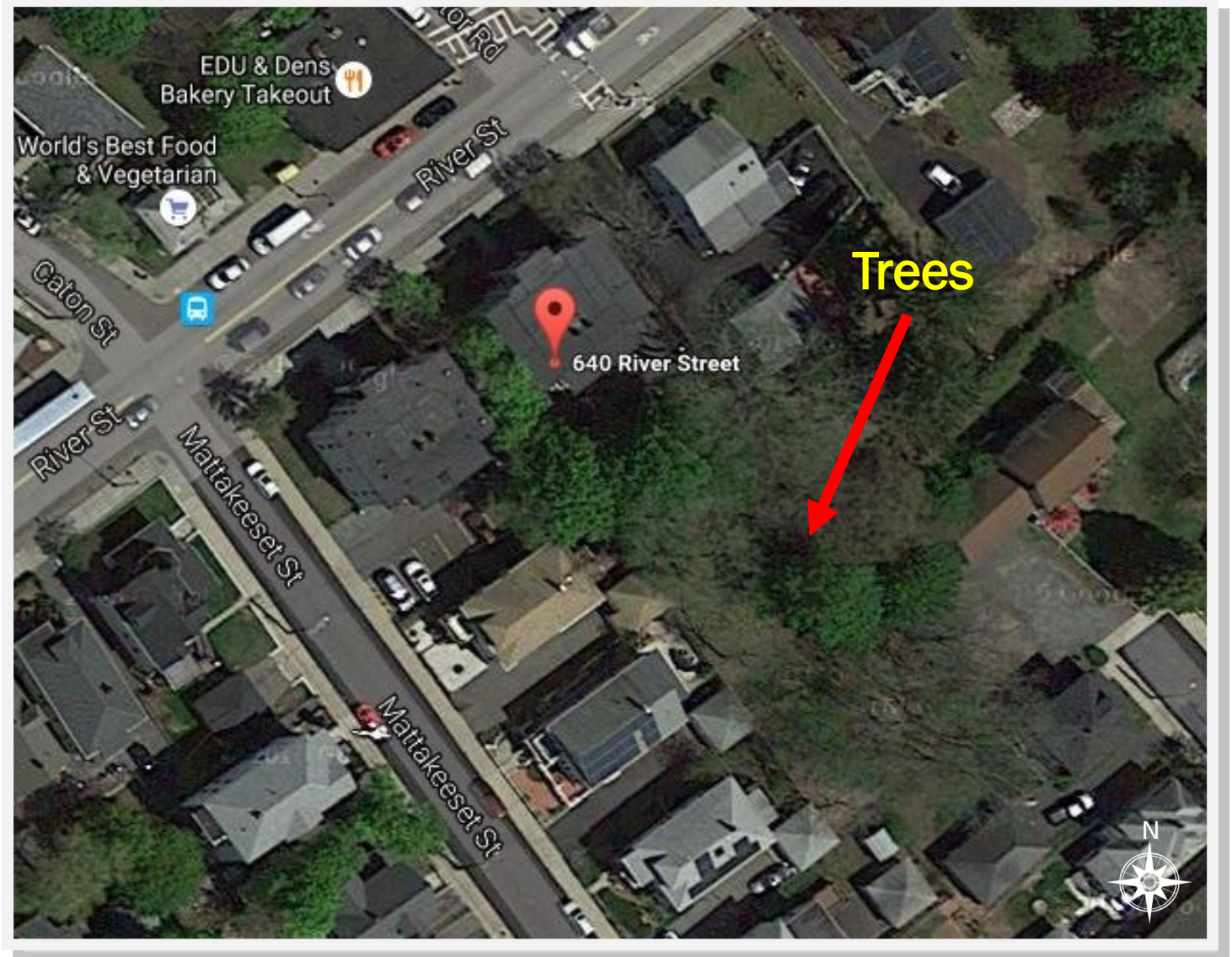
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Vacant Sites

Aerial View

- The aerial view of the flag parcel shows the main area to be wooded. The site is tucked inside a cluster of residences and will have several abutters.





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Vacant Sites

Amenities

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- ☒ Near City Parks
- ☒ Greenbelt Protection Area

- ☒ Neighborhood Design Review District
- ☒ Neighborhood Design Overlay District
- ☐ Use of Premises Permit
- ☐ Water Connection
- ☐ Nutrient Management Plan
- ☐ Electricity Connection
- ☐ Curb Cut
- ☒ City Tree Removal
- ☐ Soil Test
- ☐ Composting
- ☐ Structures (Building Permit)
- ☐ Business Permit

For a step by step instructions on navigating site development for ground level farms less than one acre, please refer to the Harvard Food Law and Policy Council Guide (listed on page).



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Vacant Sites

Site Overview

The site at Dyer Court is located in South Dorchester near the border of Mattapan. Dorchester is a diverse neighborhood with 38,683 foreign born people making up 32.0% of the population.²⁰ There are 29,216 children under age 18 making up nearly a quarter (24.2%) of the population.²¹ Additionally, there is a large elderly population of 10,882, or 9.0% of the population. These age characteristics indicate a need for special considerations around food. A more in depth look at census tract 1003, where the site is located, shows how an urban farm can be an asset to a community facing food insecurity.



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- At a rate of 26.6%, food insecurity affects over a quarter of residents.²² This means that 1 out of 4 people does not know where their next meal will come from 2 days out of the week.²³ Placing a production site in this census tract can increase resident's access to fresh, healthy food. If the farmer sells produce at an onsite farm stand, through a CSA program, or nearby at a farmers' market or corner store, then residents in the area will have additional outlets for fresh food.
- At a rate of 18.9%, nearly 1 out of 5 people live in poverty.²⁴ If these individuals receive SNAP benefits, then they are eligible to participate in the Boston Bounty Bucks program, which matches their farmers' market purchase of up to ten dollars. Urban farmers who sell produce at a local farmers' market can contribute to making fresh, healthy food more affordable for low-income residents. Offering CSA shares on a sliding scale can also help accommodate households of lower income.
- Unemployment occurs at a rate of 15.3% in the census tract.²⁵ About 1 out of 7 people are unemployed.²⁶ A farming operation can provide work opportunity in the form of employment, internship, or job training to local residents.

Vacant Sites

Food Insecurity

Food Insecurity Rate	26.6%
Boston FI Rate	16.6%
Unemployment Rate	15.3%
Poverty Rate	18.9%
Percent Black/ African American	82.6%
Percent Hispanic/ Latino	16.3%
Home Ownership Rate	52.5%
Median Household Income	\$48,320

Source: Food insecurity rates made available through the following research: Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, A. Crumbaugh, M. Kato & E. Engelhardt. *Map the Meal Gap 2016: Food Insecurity and Child Food Insecurity Estimates at the County Level*. Feeding America, 2016. Food Insecurity and additional data compiled and visualized by D. Taitelbaum, The Greater Boston Food Bank, 2016.



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Vacant Sites

Community Resources

Community Groups	Potential Partnership
<p>Bethlehem Baptist Church</p> <p>St. Matthew's Parish</p> <p>Mt. Olive Kingdom Builders Center (church)</p> <p>Zion Temple Holy Church and Food Pantry</p>	<p>Parishioners volunteer at the farm and receive fresh produce in return, farmer makes donations to the pantry when produce is abundant</p> <p>Students visit the farm and taste vegetables</p> <p>Students design a science experiment at the farm</p> <p>Low income customers buy produce with discount</p> <p>Spreads word about events at the farm</p> <p>Residents take public transportation to visit the farm</p>
Community Institutions	
<p>Wesley Education Center (daycare)</p> <p>Boston International High School</p>	
Markets	
<p>Codman Square Farmers' Market (0.8 miles)</p> <p>Eduardo's Market Incorporated</p>	
Transportation	
<p>Bus 26 stops at 247 Norfolk Street opposite to Capen Street</p>	



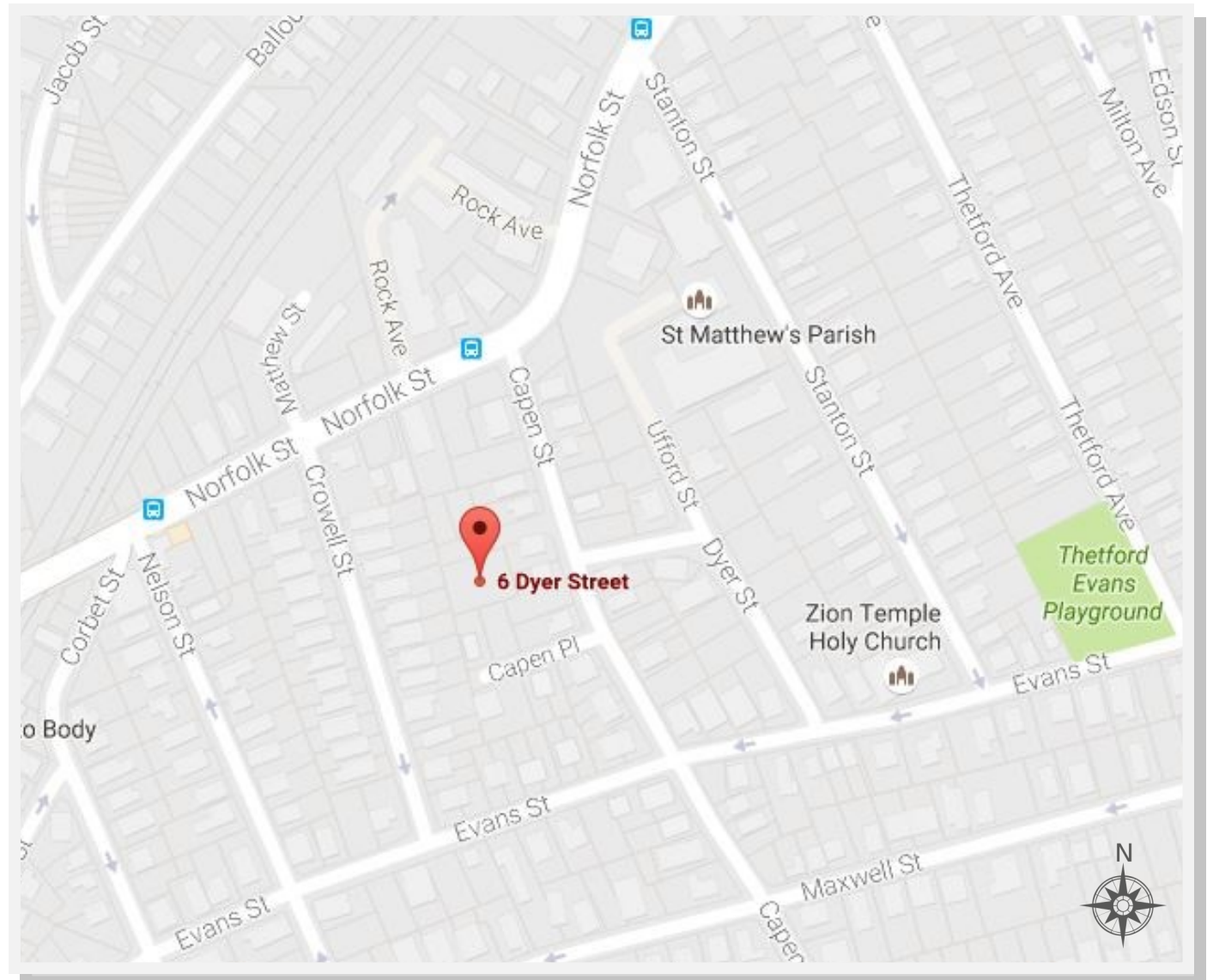
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Vacant Sites

Location

- The map shows the approximate location of **Dyer Court**, a paper street with 2 smaller lots on the north side, and one larger lot on the south side. Dyer Court is located in South Dorchester near the border of Mattapan.





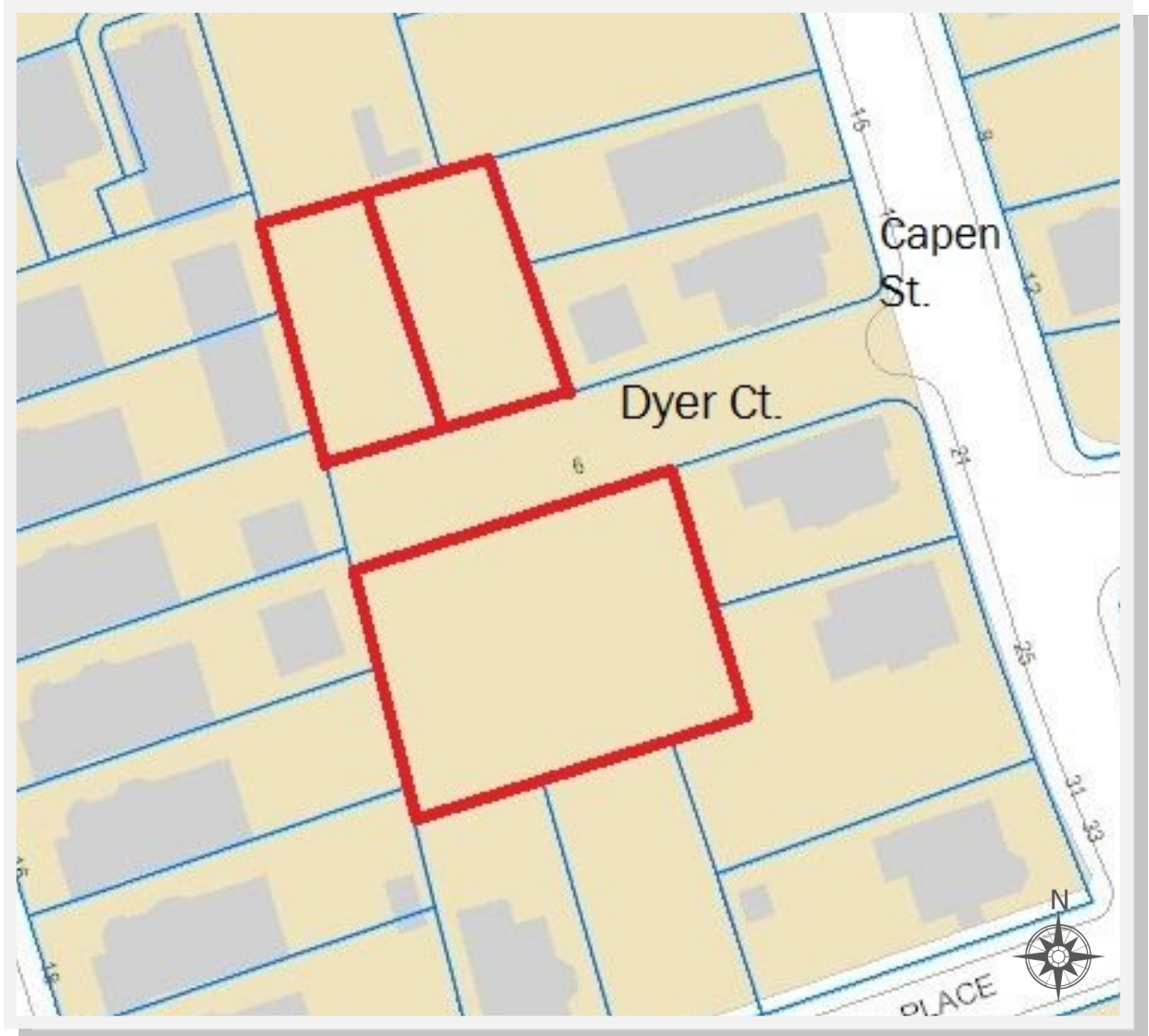
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Vacant Sites

Size: 15,205 SF

- The **red** outline demarcates the set of (three) parcels that sit on either side of Dyer Court, a paper street that was never developed. Dyer Court is located off of Capen street between two residences. The three parcels have been grouped together to make a larger site, totaling **15,205 square feet**.





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Vacant Sites

Street View

- The view from Capen Street shows that Dyer Court has been cleared but was never developed. Towards the end of Dyer Court, to which the vacant parcels are adjacent, there are several trees.



Dyer Court entrance from Capen Street



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Vacant Sites

Aerial View

- The photo shows an aerial view of the site, which is tucked between rows of abutters on the east and west sides. The entrance from Capen Street is on the right (east side). The lots are heavily wooded, and trees may need to be removed.





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Vacant Sites

Amenities

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Next Steps



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Where to Start

Rallying community members to transform a vacant plot into a farm will require energy and determination. Although there is city-owned land available for purchase, community buy-in and support is equally valuable. Start by talking with neighbors, going door to door and seeking out people who are passionate about bringing a farm to life. Share with them what you have learned about the benefits and potential impacts of urban farms. Also make a point to write and share a business plan for the operation. See if you can identify leaders in your community and ask them to help promote your initiative, especially if you have a neighborhood council or local community development corporation. Going the journey as a group is highly encouraged.

When you have reached the consensus among your group to develop a vacant site as a farm, you may reach out to the Office of Food Initiatives (OFI) to express your interest in converting a vacant plot in your neighborhood. This will give us a sense of your mission and vision and allow us to give you suggestions on how to make your case stronger. We can help familiarize you with the technical steps needed to be taken to comply with city regulations as well as give you a hand in figuring out the next steps to acquiring city land. The Department of Neighborhood Development (DND) will put out a request for proposals (RFP) when there is a pool of applicants who have demonstrated their interest and ability to take on and transform a site to productive use for a long period.



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A Successful Candidate for Urban Farming

The Office of Food Initiatives (OFI) and the Department of Neighborhood Development (DND) are united in supporting urban agriculture activity in the City of Boston. Please reach out to the Office Food Initiatives for questions about planning, policy and visioning for your proposed farm. When you are ready to develop a proposal, please contact the Department of Neighborhood Development to discuss possibilities for land acquisition.

A successful candidate will be able to demonstrate the following to DND:

1. The candidate has a partner, such as a community development corporation or a land trust, that is willing to work with the city to develop the site and will be able to cover the costs of development and the price of the land.
2. The candidate has a partner who is able to oversee farming operations and maintain the site for several years.
3. The candidate is able to integrate with the social landscape where the site is located and demonstrates positive, collaborative relationships with abutters and residents in the neighborhood.

A successful candidate will also be able to demonstrate to OFI the ability to provide services to the immediate community. Some examples include sale of produce on site, offering community volunteer sessions, or engaging with social causes like climate change.



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Useful Resources

The following resources provide useful information on what it takes to establish a farm in Boston:

- [Integrating Urban Farms into the Social Landscape](#)

A step by step guide to gaining support from the community.

- [Urban Agriculture in the City of Boston](#)

Information on grants, loans, training programs, business planning, and landscape architects.

- [Article 89 Made Easy](#)

An interpretation of Zoning Article 89 in lay terms.

- [Guide to a ground level, less than one acre farm](#)

A step by step guide to complying with city regulations to establish a farm site.

- [Farming Concrete](#)

A data collection toolkit for measuring impacts of your farm or garden.

- [Massachusetts Urban Farming Conference](#)

This annual conference entails a full day of workshops and speakers on various topics related to urban farming.

- Northeast Organic Farmers Association Conference, [Summer](#), [Winter](#)

A biannual conference on all things related to organic agriculture in Massachusetts.

- [Trust for Public Land](#)

A land trust with services available to the Boston community.



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